

## But The World Keeps Turning by ryuutora

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Anxiety, Bev doesn't move away AU, Cuddling & Snuggling, Fluff, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Inspired somewhat by The Chrysalids, Loser-pile lol, M/M, Mentions of underage drinking, Superpowers, Telepathic Bond, Telepathic Bonds as a gift from the Cosmic Turtle, Telepathy, The telepathy equivalent of a group chat, mentions of smoking, now with just as much chaos!, technically

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Maggie Tozier, Mike Hanlon, Reginald "Belch" Huggins, Richie Tozier, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris, Victor Criss

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

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**Summary:**

In the summer of 1989, seven Losers fight a killer clown in the sewers under Derry, Maine and win. Life, it would seem, can go back to normal now that It's gone.

Until they wake up the following morning with a strange new ability that is absolutely, without question, as far from "normal" as shit could get. And how, pray tell, are they expected to navigate life without raising any suspicion when they can literally read each others' minds?

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

Sometimes I think about the plot of one of those 'required reading' books from high school and I'm like, "Huh, was that fucked up or what?" and sometimes I think about them and I'm like, "Hey, you know what sounds like a cool AU? The kids all develop telepathic powers they can use to communicate with each other, like those kids in *The Chrysalids*. Would that be fucked up or what?"

And so, I present to you, this trainwreck.

\*the kids talk about alcohol and drugs in this chapter, but no one actually uses any (they're kids!!!!)

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"I need to use your shower."

"My, that's very forward of you," Richie says with a lascivious wink before he can think better of it. "I mean, I'll have to check with your mom since she doesn't really like to share me, but--"

"I'm serious. I need to use your fucking shower because if I go home like this *my mom* is going to drag me to the fucking hospital and-- and--" Eddie sucks in a wheezing breath, fumbling for an inhaler he doesn't *have* -- he tossed it into the overgrowth of weeds outside the house on Neibolt Street, along with the entire rest of his fanny pack, so it's safe to assume they'll never see it again unless they decide wading through poison ivy and stinging nettle sounds like a fun time. Richie doesn't know how to help without it, so he just nods and pushes further into his personal space to capture his attention.

"Okay. Yeah, you can use the shower, but don't waste all the hot water, 'cause I'm covered in sewer gunk, too." He puts a hand on Eddie's shoulder, turns him bodily, and marches them off in the direction of his house.

The rest of the Losers are supposed to meet him there once they've cleaned up, too. He doesn't know what part of that bothers him -- leaves a little frantic knot in his gut.

Or maybe he does, and he's just too afraid to admit that this all feels like some kind of hallucination, like he'll blink and find himself back in the sewers, fighting *It* again. He doesn't *want* to feel like his friends aren't safe, and he doesn't *want* them out of his sight in case they're *wrong* and *It* comes back and this time, the rest of them are too late to save their friend.

So taking Eddie home with him eases that uncomfortable feeling of combined foreboding and overprotectiveness he couldn't quite quell. Loosens the knot a little.

It's unnaturally quiet between them for some time, all the way up Jackson Street -- they avoid West Broadway altogether, even though this route takes longer, without really mentioning it. The idea of being caught by Mrs. Kaspbrak terrifies Richie in ways he can't quite make sense of, outside of his tentative understanding of Eddie's desperation to avoid her. Bill's house is quiet when they pass it; quieter, somehow, than the rest of the world around them. The shuttered silence bleeds mourning and Richie frowns, briefly considering stopping in to check on him, but a shared look with Eddie tells him they understand the same: Big Bill isn't something vulnerable, and they've seen him torn open before the world too many times today already. He needs a moment's peace, just to himself, where he doesn't have to be strong for the rest of them.

It's funny, because the sun is warm and the day is beautiful and bright -- it's a *perfect* summer day. A perfect day to screw around by the trainyard or take a dip in the public pool or lounge in Bassey Park eating rocket pops and making crude jokes, but it doesn't *feel* that way. Richie is cold, from more than just the greywater soaking his clothes and squelching in his shoes. It's *funny* that everything around him is warm and sunny and *alive* and he feels like ice is locking up his joints, making him shiver inside and out.

He doesn't laugh.

"I might not be able to stay tonight," Eddie says suddenly, once

Bill's bereaved house is out of sight. His arms are folded tightly over his chest and he hunches into himself, sullen and filthy (Richie wisely opts not to mention the filth, because that's the kind of thing that sets off an asthma attack and, well, if *he's* feeling fragile right now then Eddie must be a ticking time bomb). "I've been-- I mean, like you said, my face is probably plastered all over milk cartons by now and we've been gone for who-knows-how-long and... and I fought with my mom before I left and she's probably just gonna fucking kill me, actually. I'm a dead man."

"Moms can't kill their kids," says Richie, aware of how direly unconvincing he sounds. "She's just gonna be..." He trails off. Squints at Eddie, who doesn't meet his gaze. He doesn't actually *know* what she'll do. Eddie isn't fond of discussing his home life with them -- not even with Bill, his best and longest friend. Richie doesn't know much about his friend's mother except what he's learned through a few brief interactions (she hates his guts) and Eddie's unending mantra of, *"My mom's gonna kill me. My mom would be pissed. My mom is gonna be so mad."*

She's not the most pleasant person, Richie's inferred, and like he said, they're a little fragile right now, and Eddie doesn't need that shit. Eddie doesn't *deserve* that shit (not now, not ever). And he won't be dealing with it today. Not if Richie has any say in the matter.

He shrugs. "Don't go home, then. Easy."

"I *can't*--" Eddie blanches, makes a horrid little gasping noise but thankfully doesn't work himself into a full-blown attack, because he doesn't have his fucking inhaler and Richie doesn't know fucking CPR or whatever-the-fuck. Eddie's fingernails dig into the skin of his upper arm, just above the stained and battered cast, and he purses his lips. Scrunches his eyebrows. Tries to scowl at Richie with little success. "I can't just not fucking go home, genius. She'll be pissed."

"Isn't she already?"

"Huh?"

"Pissed? Isn't she already gonna be pissed off at you? You've been gone for like, an entire day, apparently after having a *fight* with her,

and now, after *all that shit*,” Richie gestures broadly behind them, in the general direction of the Neibolt House and the sewer pipe they just escaped through, “you’re just gonna waltz back into your house and let her tear you a new one?”

“I have to.”

“Like fuck you do.” They’ve stopped now, barely a block from Richie’s house, engaged in some kind of stand-off wherein Eddie looks like he can’t decide whether to bolt or pass out or clock Richie in the face. “We just went through hell together. All of us. And all of us are gonna *stay* together tonight. So, fuck no, you aren’t going home. Because I’m not an idiot, Eds. She’s not gonna let you leave the house again once you’re there. And she’ll probably take you to the hospital *anyway*, in case you managed to get hurt while you were gone or some shit.”

Eddie’s stormy brown eyes trace a path all around Richie and back again, like the right answers are hidden just over his shoulder. His expression is indiscernible but Richie doesn’t like the way it feels anyway. “She’ll be--”

“She’s already mad! She’s already fucking mad! We’ve established this.” Now he pushes into Eddie’s space again, plants both hands firmly on his shoulders, and nudges until his feet are moving. “And we’re just gonna putting off dealing with how mad she is as long as fucking possible.”

Eddie sucks in a deep breath that puffs out his chest, blowing it all out through his teeth. He un-scrunches his face, nods, and says, “Yeah. Fuck, *yeah*. Fuck going home. We almost *died* today. I can do whatever the fuck I want.”

“A-ha! I knew there was a little rebellion in you, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie coos, facetiously wide-eyed and sincere.

Eddie snorts and shoves him with a, “Don’t call me that,” hands warm and caked with dirt -- Richie’s heart leaps but Eddie doesn’t mention the grime. Doesn’t work himself into a frenzy over it, at least, and Richie wonders briefly if that really is rebellion; the way tossing all his dozens of necessary medications away before entering

the Well House had been an act of rebellion. Stupid, for sure, but rebellious in a way Edward “Yes, Mommy” Kaspbrak is assuredly *not*.

Or maybe, like the rest of them, he’s too caught up in processing the events of the day to focus on the little things. Even for Eddie, surely, near-death by killer clown is a touch more significant than, say, sewer water on his skin.

Perhaps not, though, Richie thinks bitterly as he’s blasted with ice-cold water following Eddie’s hour-long shower, after which he’d emerged from the washroom looking scrubbed raw and red, in ways that were surely uncomfortable. A smile had lit his face when he’d spotted Richie, turning sheepish when Richie had pointed at the clock with one hand on his hip.

“Greywater is *full* of bacteria,” he’d defended, and now Richie, hopeless fool that he must be, shivers and hops from foot to foot as he tries to clean himself to Eddie’s standards as fast as humanly possible.

“I’m gonna fucking get you, Eds!” he shouts through chattering teeth. There’s a muffled reply from the other side of the door, equally loud and angry, that he can’t make out. “You’re lucky you’re cute!”

He still can’t quite hear whatever the fuck Eddie’s saying to him, but he carries on for several long seconds, high-pitched and fast-paced. All Richie catches is, “*Don’t--*” and some of the various expletives peppered throughout his rant.

“I’m dumping ice water on you in the morning,” he threatens as he throws the bathroom door open and stares Eddie down from across the hall, through his wide-open bedroom door. He’s leaning against the foot of Richie’s bed with an old Spider-Man comic in his hands, mischief lighting his eyes. The descending sun pouring in the window behind him illuminates the dust mites floating by and turns his hair a golden colour. Distantly, Richie thinks about how Eddie’s always pressing him to dust his goddamn room once in a while, or at least clean *something*, and how, wow, he should probably dust soon, *haha*. He frowns harder and twists his fingers into the towel tied around his waist. “Jerk.”

Eddie stares right back, clearly fighting a smile, the comic in his hands forgotten. "You wouldn't."

"Don't test me, Eds. I'll fuckin' do it. That was torture."

"Sorry," he says insincerely. "Greywater is--"

"Full of bacteria, yeah, I heard. I'm covered in the shit, too, dude."

"The... *literal* shit." Eddie kind of screws up his face at that, and ducks down, out of the sunlight. For a second, Richie thinks he's about to gag or something, and prepares to leap across the room and retrieve the old inhaler Eddie was planning to throw out from his desk drawer, but then a bark of laughter rings through the room. "Holy *fuck*, Rich, what the hell has been going on? Is any of this real?"

"As real as me and your mom's--"

"Beep beep, Richie! Don't even *start* with--"

"Healthy, loving, age-appropriate relationship. Get your mind out of the gutter, ya perv." Satisfied that Eddie isn't about to give himself an asthma attack over some germs, he strolls across the room to fish around in his closet, tossing a hideously bright shirt and a pair of denim shorts onto the bed. "We gotta set up the basement for everyone else. Can you start that while I get dressed?"

Eddie takes the time to replace the comic exactly where he retrieved it from the haphazard pile on the floor. Richie's filing system may be senseless but it still exists, somehow.

"Eds," Richie says before he can stop himself.

Eddie pauses in the doorway. "Don't call me that," he tosses over his shoulder.

"It's pretty real," Richie continues anyway. "It's real, but... I think we're okay."

And Eddie looks at him funny, like he knows Richie isn't usually

capable of being, like, genuinely reassuring (it's true), and Richie's big fucking mouth plows right on, "As okay as me and your mom's sex life." He thrusts his hips obscenely, tipping his head back to laugh at his obviously-hilarious joke, as Eddie heaves an enormous sigh and rolls his eyes.

"Just 'okay'?" he asks with a raised eyebrow, when Richie stops humping the air. "I'm sorry to hear that." Before Richie can form any sort of response, he's disappearing down the hall.

"*Damn*, Spaghetti-man. Catch me off-guard, why dontcha," he mutters to the empty room.

Maggie Tozier walks in the front door, weighed down by overstuffed plastic grocery bags, just as Richie is descending the stairs into the foyer. "Oh, there you are, Richie. I was wondering where you'd disappeared to. Can you get these? I've got more in the car."

She pushes the groceries into his arms and heads back outside. "Oh, yeah, yeah, sure, I got it, yeah. By the way, a sewer clown with weird magic powers tried to kill me today," he calls after her, half-hoping she'll hear.

Upon receiving no response, he dumps all the bags on the kitchen island, snags an armful of assorted junk food from the haul, and makes a break for the basement before she can catch him and force him to help put everything away.

"Eddie, I got the goods!" he shouts, footfalls raucous on the old-ass stairs.

"The *what*?" Eddie's head pops up from the other side of the couch, where he's likely piling cushions on the floor in the typical fashion for Losers Club overnights -- though now, with more people, it'll be a tight fit. "*Richie*, did you-- oh, you meant fucking Oreos."

"Oh, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie gasps, hand to his heart in mock disbelief, "did you think I meant *drugs*?"

A throw pillow narrowly misses his head. "I thought you meant *booze*, jerkoff."



"I can do that, too," Richie assures him solemnly, already turning back towards the stairs.

"Do *not!* We are *thirteen* years old, Richie, what the fuck? That's illegal, and *definitely* bad for us."

"I think we've earned it," he teases. "We killed a killer clown. We survived Bowers, somehow. You fought with your mom, which we should come back to, by the way. We managed to not die in the creepy, nasty-ass sewers. We might as well be grown-ups at this point."

Eddie scrubs a hand over his eyes, through his hair (it dries all curly when he doesn't put any product in it, and Richie's always kind of loved that, he thinks), a world-weary sigh bursting out of him. "Please just bring the food and stop trying to break the law."

Mrs. Tozier is the first on the scene when the doorbell rings almost an hour later, Richie and Eddie only halfway up the stairs. They distinctly hear Bev's voice drift down from the foyer and Richie takes the rest of the steps two at a time, skidding into the hall to find a somewhat flushed, panting Bev chatting amiably with his mom in the doorway. Her bike tire is still spinning where she dumped it on the front lawn, silver flashes in the summer sun.

"Hey, Richie," she says, with a half-assed salute.

"I'm having some friends sleep over, mom," Richie explains, and gets the usual shrug and, "Okay, hun. Have fun. Nice to officially meet you, Beverly."

She disappears into the kitchen again without another word.

"You look like you booked it here," Eddie observes tactlessly, leaning against the door jamb as he watches her toe off her shoes and set them aside.

She shakes her head, fixing up her wild auburn curls as she stands again. "Didn't want to spend any more time in that place than necessary."

Eddie hums. Bev catches his eye. Richie thinks something passes

between them and suddenly feels terribly excluded. He's about to ask what the hell the silent conversation is about when Bev looks Eddie up and down and *smirks*, wide and amused. "What's, uh, what's going on there?"

Richie lent him his least-obnoxious, least-ugly (smallest) clothes, but they're still obviously Richie's. He cringes -- what does Bev *think* is going on? They're *thirteen*. *Nothing* is-- he *didn't*-- Thank fucking god she can't read minds or something because he thinks he must short-circuit, and yeah, *maybe* he missed Eddie so fucking bad the last couple weeks, when he was practically under house arrest, that he went half out of his mind and carved their initials on the Kissing Bridge in a fit of desperation.

She doesn't *know* about that, right? No one knows about that. Right? Those letters could mean anything. *Anyone* could have carved them.

But then Eddie speaks, and his panic grinds to a halt. "Didn't want to spend any more time in that place than necessary," he says, slow, turning the phrase over on his tongue as if he's testing it out. Bev's smirk falls away. She nods once.

Whatever exchange they were having ends just like that, and Eddie leads Bev down to the basement where they've set up all the works: movies, board games, video games, snacks of all sorts, the old pool table, the stereo system, the massive nest of blankets and cushions for everyone to lounge in.

"We'll order a pizza once everyone's here." He fishes a notepad out of a cabinet by the dry bar and tosses it on the coffee table they've shoved aside to make space for the blanket nest. "Write down the toppings you want."

"No one else is here yet?"

Richie shrugs. "Eds is here."

"My name's not fucking Eds, shit-nut," Eddie snaps from where he's situated himself in front of the VCR and is sifting through a stack of tapes. "Where the hell did you put *The Breakfast Club*?"

“We’re not watching *The fucking Breakfast Club*. That’s Hannah’s dumb movie. We’re watching *Top Gun*, that’s why it’s the first in the pile, genius.”

“Oh, so I just have to deal with this alone. That’s great,” Bev says with false cheer, flopping back into the cushions with the notepad in her hand.

Everyone else arrives within about half an hour after that. Bev is visibly relieved when Ben and Stan appear at the top of the stairs (Stan makes a quip about her ‘surviving the ordeal’, to which she responds, “You have *no* idea,” with a disbelieving shake of her head).

“Imagine knowing them since kindergarten,” he says, taking the pen and pad from Bev to jot down his pizza order before passing it to Ben.

“I’d rather not.”

“Oi, oi, oi! That’s a right rude thing to say, that is,” Richie complains, in the shitty Irish accent he’s been working on since May, shoving his glasses back in place from where they’re threatening to slip off his nose. He’s propped against the front of the couch, feet tangled in the comforters spread on the floor around him, already deeply absorbed in *The Breakfast Club*, while Eddie sips a can of Coke beside him and shuts off an alarm on his wristwatch.

There’s movement from the doorway and then footsteps on the stairs, but Richie’s attention has snapped to Eddie, who just goes back to watching the movie and drinking his pop.

And, well, now that he has a moment to *think* about it... “You threw away your stupid fanny pack.”

“It’s not *stupid*, it’s practical, okay? It’s hands-free storage and it’s not as bulky as a backpack. It’s, like, *ideal*.” Eddie sticks his tongue out at him and turns back to the screen.

He doesn't say anything about the medication and Richie isn't sure he should push it. "Not everyone is as obsessed with keeping medical supplies handy as you, geez."

"Preparedness is *important*. Remember when you split your knee open on that rock at the quarry? If I wasn't there with a first aid kit you would have gotten gangrene and had your leg amputated."

Richie rolls his eyes and finds Bill hopping over the back of the couch to join them. He gestures exasperatedly to Eddie and Bill grins. "Be prepared," he cheeks, flashing a Boy Scout sign.

"Traitor," Richie grumbles, crossing his arms.

"You know, they used to put real cocaine in Coca-Cola," Ben, apparently oblivious to the utter betrayal taking place across the room, says out of the blue as he rummages through the mini-fridge under the bar.

Eddie chokes on the mouthful of Coke he was about to swallow. "What?"

"Not *anymore*. But it used to be made with actual drugs in it." Bev scoots over to make space for Ben, by Richie's feet, and he passes the bowl of popcorn to her for her trouble.

Eddie sets the Coke aside, somewhere on the floor.

Mike lands on Richie's other side. "Pizza order's ready."

"*Actual* cocaine?" Richie asks incredulously, brain finally catching up. "*Cocaína*? 'Say hello to my little friend' cocaine? And they *sold* it?"

"Yes, Richie, the 1800s were a different--"

"Why the fuck did they stop?"

Stan heaves a world-weary sigh and snatches up the notepad. "I'll call."

Too invested in the absolute fuckery unfolding within his mind,

Richie ignores him. "Can you imagine Tony Montana guarding a mountain of Coca-fucking-Cola? Holy shit."

"Great, wuh-we broke Richie," Bill chimes in from somewhere behind him, then he slips down into the nest beside Eddie. In the same second, Bev chuckles and glances at him over her shoulder with a, "The *last* thing you need is cocaine, Richie."

"Where do you come across all this fascinating information, Haystack?" Richie asks playfully as he scoots forward to steal some popcorn for himself.

"The library. That fancy building in the middle of town you've never seen the inside of," Ben says with an astoundingly straight face.

"Yowza! Give as good as you get, huh?" Richie laughs, winking, and the smile Ben was fighting breaks through. He knew there was something he liked about New Kid besides the ounce of common sense they were so severely lacking before he came along.

Richie high-fives him and turns to offer some of his popcorn to Eddie.

Eddie, for his part, seems to snap out of whatever daze he was in. "Hey," he says, then falls silent, Richie's generous offer unacknowledged. Richie forgets about the cocaine and the popcorn, anyway, and squints down at him. His unfocused gaze is still fixed on the television screen, reflecting flickers of the film playing in the background of their shenanigans. "Have you guys ever heard of, uh, gazeboes? No, no, plaz-- no, shit, do you know what I'm saying?"

"Like the canopy thing in peoples' backyards?" Mike asks somewhere beside him.

Eddie shakes his head. Doesn't look away from the T.V. "No, like, *medicine*, plazee--"

"Placebos?" Ben turns, now, face half-illuminated in the dimmed lights of the basement, frown playing at his lips. "Sugar pills?"

"Yes! Yes, that's the word!" Eddie leaps forward, onto his hands and knees, pushing into Ben's space, face alight with relief. "What are

they? What do they do? Greta Keene says they're fake."

Clearly confused, Ben nods. "Yeah? They're just sugar. They don't do anything. They're meant to trick people into thinking they're being treated for something."

And fuck if Richie has never seen Eddie's face fall faster. "So she wasn't lying?"

"Did... duh-did Greta Kuh-Keene tell you...?" Bill trails off, seemingly unsure how to finish that question.

Mike does it for him. "Did she tell you your medications were placebos?"

"Oh, shit." Eddie sits back again, elbow bumping Richie's arm. "I was right? She was right? How do I prove that?"

"Well... when was the last time you actually took your pills?" Ben asks, but Eddie is too busy wheezing to answer.

His breathing speeds up rapidly, and it feels like a split second before that familiar tea-kettle whistle blows past his lips and, sure, they just talked about his medicine being fake, but Richie's natural instinct is to bolt upstairs, throw open the drawer of his desk, and fish out the spare aspirator.

There are some ways that he *does* like to be prepared, and as he'd said, "*You could probably get a few more puffs of the good stuff out of it if you need it.*"

Lo and behold, this is one of the times they seem to need it.

Eddie hasn't calmed down any by the time Richie gets back, cheeks flushing with the effort of trying to suck in a breath, but Bill had the sense to make the other Losers give him the space he needs to at least *try*. Richie presses the inhaler into his hand and brings it to his lips, and Eddie reflexively squeezes the trigger and breathes in deep. Does so a second time, and his eyes flutter open and land on Richie, still wide and scared. "She lied to me," he gasps, then puts the inhaler to his mouth again. "Is that bad?"

Richie isn't an expert on parenting. He's thirteen. He *knows*, logically, that parents lie about things all the time. Santa Claus. The Tooth Fairy. What happened to the hamster. He knows sometimes parents lie to protect kids, too (see: what happened to the hamster). They lie about how terrible the world really is and what happens to the kids who disappear, one after another, all year long, and about their own relationship troubles and about money and the weather and *all kinds of things*.

But too often Richie has passively observed as Eddie was forced to miss out on things because of his sickness, his constitution, his *fragility*, his lungs and heart and this and *that*, and it's like ice water being dumped on his head to realize that might have all just been a ploy to-- to-- *what?* Keep him prisoner in his own home? This kind of lying doesn't seem like it was really doing anything to protect him, because what was there to protect him from, if it was all made up?

It's easier not to answer the question at all.

"You okay?" he asks Eddie's frightened eyes, and Eddie blinks, slow, still panting a bit, and glances down at the aspirator.

"But it's fake," he says, too quiet, and it sounds more like a question.

"I think the point of some placebos is to trick you into thinking you need it," Ben muses. This does not seem to make Eddie feel better.

Everyone is looking to Richie to fix things, he can *sense* it. It is his area of expertise, he supposes.

"At least it's not cocaine," he offers lamely, and Eddie stares blankly for a couple seconds before snorting.

"I mean... *yeah, I guess.*"

"Pizza will be here in twenty!" Stan calls, closing the basement door behind him on his way back down.

Richie gives Eddie his Game Boy to play with and that seems to placate him, but he hovers anyway. He has the inhaler, after all,

crammed in the pocket of his shorts, because Eddie doesn't have his fanny pack anymore and while Richie would love to be proud of him for standing up to his mom after she pulled shit like *that*, there's also that little nagging worry that conjures up images of Eddie suffocating in his arms because what if, maybe, he really *does* need the inhaler, so *just in case*--

*Alright, Boy Scout, cool it*, he thinks, laughing quietly at himself and his hypocrisy.

\*

The *very* first thought Richie has upon waking is, '*Fuck, man, I have to piss like a racehorse.*' Followed promptly by the realization that he's so tangled in Losers who are dead to the world that he's going to have to bomb-squad-stealth extract himself from this mess of limbs and bodies, unless he wants to disturb them at ass o'clock in the morning. The television is a flickering *hum* of saturated blue and static, the only light source, as he peels Bill's arm off his calf.

And then he hears a snicker. '*Vulgar. No wonder everyone calls him Trashmouth,*' Bev is saying, in a soft, almost warbled way -- like the origin of the sound wasn't quite right.

His sleep-addled brain doesn't process much of that, but he does twist around to look at Bev like she's grown an extra head, expecting that she must be talking in her sleep, but her eyes are open, reflecting the blue-ish light from the T.V. eerily. She cracks a smile.

"What?" Richie says, eloquently, and as quietly as he can manage, since everyone else is still asleep and what little he can see of the sky is barely greying with the light of dawn.

"*What* what?" she asks, equally quiet.

"Are you sleep-talking?"

"Are you sleep-walking?"



“Touché.”

“What are you doing?”

“I gotta piss.” Richie shrugs.

“You said that already. I mean why are you interrogating me about it?”

Behind Bev, Stan huffs in his sleep and rolls away from them. Richie’s still trying to wake the fuck up, but something isn’t adding up here and he’s really almost too tired to deal with it. And too desperate to take a leak.

“Deal with what?” Bev asks, at the same time Richie says, “I never said that.”

“Wait, what?” they say, this time in unison.

Richie’s mouth snaps shut and he wonders, with a jolt, if Bev just heard something he was *thinking*.

And her eyes go wide. Like, dinner-plate wide. Like, popping out of her head *wide*. She sits bolt upright, definitely disturbing Mike and Stan this time, hand flying up to cover her mouth.

*'Am I dreaming?'*

“Am *I*? What the *fuck*?” Richie points at her and demands, “What colour am I thinking of right now?” And thinks as loudly and boisterously as he can form a *thought*, *'Purple, purple, purple--'*

“Purple?”

“What the *fuck*?!” Richie says, with no pretense of attempting to stay quiet.

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## 2. Chapter 2

### Notes for the Chapter:

this fic is DESTINED to be a trainwreck

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The rest of the Losers have officially been roused by Richie's latest outburst, heads turning against pillows, eyes blinking open, Eddie muttering something into the blanket he's cocooned himself in.

*'Oh, crap, what time is it?'* Mike's voice cuts through Richie's head next, languid (as usual) but harried nonetheless, as he pushes himself up and rubs his eyes. More than that, there's a flash of an image in his mind that isn't his own -- the sun peeking over the horizon, the silhouette of an obnoxious rooster crowing to announce a new day.

Richie makes eye contact with Bev and he knows without asking that she heard it, too. She *saw* it, too. His heartbeat picks up. Or does hers? Her fear is tangible, enough so that it leaks through whatever the fuck connection they've formed and into his own chest.

Or... was it his to begin with?

For a third time, though now in a helpless whisper, Richie asks, "What the fuck?"

In moments, the basement descends into chaos, but surely from an outsider's perspective everything must seem -- relatively -- calm.

Inside Richie's head, though, is a different story. Everyone wakes up and it's like channels opening up with each new thought process flooding through, until they're overlapping and entangling and *escalating*, higher and higher, into confusion fear *panic confusion bewilderment anxiety stop!*

He presses his hands over his ears like that'll do anything to mitigate the onslaught of thought-voices.

Then Bill's voice, clear as day, rings through the basement, "Suh-

stop! Everyone juh-just breathe. Be quiet.”

*‘I don’t know how to make my **literal** thoughts be quiet, Big Bill!’* he thinks, and Bill shrugs, exasperation exploding outward from him.

“Nuh-neither do I. Just *try*.”

Whatever everyone else does, works, because the frantic amalgamation of thought-voices tapers out into mostly background noise. He tries to chase them and finds them just comfortably out of reach, like blinds were drawn over their minds. Well, Mike’s and Bill’s, at least. Eddie’s ramblings are still pounding into his skull, albeit faded, and Bev’s repeating, *“quiet, quiet, quiet,”* to herself like that’ll help and between Stan and Ben there’s a lot of fluctuating in and out of focus, but whatever they’re trying is kind of, sort of working.

Richie’s head doesn’t hurt nearly as much, at least.

“Can *anyone* explain what is happening?” Mike asks, moving to stand beside Bill and peering out over the rest of the Losers still huddled on the floor.

*‘Wouldn’t we be able to tell if someone knew, since we’re all in each other’s heads?’*

*‘Richie, this is serious!’* Eddie snaps, without moving his mouth, and then looks *extremely* troubled. “I don’t like this.”

“Okay, we can hear each other’s thoughts, yeah. Why?”

There’s *actual* quiet after that. The *buzz* of other presences whittling away at the problem in the back of his head, yeah, but they’re all so concentrated on finding an answer that there’s a few moments of blissful silence while they do so. And then, almost simultaneously, that answer pops up seven times in his own mind with no discernible origin.

***‘It.’***

“Shit. Yuh-yuh-you don’t think--”

*'Deadlights, you guys, what did the deadlights--?'*

*'--don't even know what It really is--'*

"Does that mean we killed It? For real?"

*'And what? Absorbed some kind of weird telepathic powers from It?'*

"How do we know," Ben starts, tentative, eyes darting towards the stairs, "that we're the only ones?"

"What do you mean?" Mike follows his gaze and tenses. "Oh."

"Yeah. What if this is happening to everybody, and it has nothing to do with It?"

As if on cue, the door swings open and light floods down the stairs. "Richard!" Maggie Tozier sounds like she just woke up, and considering the hour she very well might have. But there's nothing there, nothing he can *quite* pick up on from her that's distinct from the rest of the Losers, but in his defense he doesn't know what he's *looking* for. Just that he can't reach into her head the way he can with everyone else right now. "Mrs. Kaspbrak has been leaving messages since yesterday asking where the hell her son is. Is Eddie down there with you?"

It's like a shot of undiluted panic straight into his veins -- almost makes him keel over on the spot. He'd vomit if he could move at all, he thinks absently, and when he manages to look at Eddie he's shaking his head frantically, pleading with Richie silently. The panic swells so big he fears he might burst, but he croaks out a, "No, mom, I haven't seen him."

"You should have invited him. I know how much you like that boy." Richie barely stops himself from thinking, *'Do you, though?'* too loudly, lest the others hear and *suspect*. "I like having him around," she adds, then the door clicks shut, cutting them off from the rest of the world again. Richie shuffles forward on his knees just enough to put a hand on Eddie's arm while he fumbles for the inhaler he's pretty sure is still in his pocket, but Eddie shakes his head harder.

Whatever he's thinking is barely contained behind the thin veil

he's managed to put up between their minds, but what he's *feeling* is visceral and Richie doesn't have to look to know it's affecting the rest of them, too. *'I told you we'd deal with it later,'* he assures, *'Later doesn't have to be now.'*

*'Can later be never?'* Eddie asks, half-joking, a haunted glaze over his eyes. The blanket he's still bundled in is pulled tighter around him.

Richie's immense headache is worsened by the sensation of Bev's thoughts surging forward into Eddie's space, too, but oddly enough he can't hear anything exchanged between them for the first few seconds and can only rely on the taut anger in Bev's face and Eddie's desperate little, "No!" for clues as to what the fuck is happening.

*'...not important right now! We need to figure out what the fuck is going on.'*

Bev huffs but doesn't push it.

"Someone should go up there to test it out," Ben suggests. "Try to, I dunno, read her thoughts or something."

"Or it could just be a thing that's happening to kids. Maybe we can try Hannah," Richie adds. If his mom is awake, then his sister probably is, too, since Maggie drives Hannah to her summer job at the little café up Main Street on her way to work.

"Okay." Bev twists a lock of hair around her fingers. "Okay, that could work. Who's going up?"

*'Obviously not Eds,'* Richie thinks with a shrug, *'since now he's like, a fugitive.'*

And whether it was Richie's intention or not, Eddie cracks a little smile at that.

Richie insists he had to piss *first*. There's a washroom in the basement, fortunately. Then he drags Bill and Stan upstairs with him while the other Losers wait for news with bated breath. He can hear, even as he closes the basement door behind him, the soft chatter of all his friends passing through his head, the *'Oh, there's still pizza left,'*

from Mike and, *'Eugh, that's been sitting out all night in a warm room, it's like a fuckin' petri dish of-- what, Mike, no, ew, Mike don't--'*

Hannah is sitting at the island with the latest edition of *Tiger Beat* in one hand, scarfing down cereal with the other. Maggie is bustling around the kitchen throwing sandwiches into paper bags and starting up the coffee pot, setting out mugs for herself and Wentworth, pausing before adding a third.

Richie stares hard. Tries to figure out what's passing through their heads. There's... *something*, but it isn't anything close to what he can pick up on from the Losers. In fact, he's pretty sure he's imagining the little flicker of contemplation from his mom as she pours a cup of coffee for her teenage daughter, and the way Hannah's limbs buzz with the exhaustion of being up way before her circadian rhythm would otherwise allow. *'Hey! Hey! Can you hear me? Hey! Hannah!'*

"Mom, Richie's creepy friends are staring at me," Hannah complains loudly, barely looking up from her magazine and the article boldly proclaiming, **"What River Phoenix looks for in a woman - do you have what it takes?"**

"That's nice, hun," Maggie says cheerfully from somewhere in the recesses of the fridge. "Do you want a Jell-o cup in your lunch today?"

Hannah rolls her eyes and grunts, in true teenage fashion, something that might be affirmation.

Richie grins when she catches his eye. "Heya. Had any good chucks lately?"

Hannah's magazine sails across the room and nails him square in the face, falling open to a blown-up image of the man himself, River Phoenix, as it lands on the linoleum. "Fuck off with your weirdo friends, weirdo."

A brown paper bag lands on the island in front of Hannah with her name scrawled across it in pink Sharpie, and Maggie bustles over to her son to take his face between her hands and plant a big, wet kiss on his forehead. Richie pretends to be grossed out, but

sometimes the affection he gets from her is something he's desperate for. He doesn't know what flips the switch -- what makes her oscillate between forgetting he exists and smothering him with her attention on the daily -- but he's grateful when it stops to rest here, where his mom bundles him up in a hug while he acts like that's *just so embarrassing, mom, my friends are right here.*

"Your dad should be up soon, hun. Let him know the coffee is ready. And there's some cash on the counter; I figured since I don't have time to make everyone breakfast, you could take your friends out to Rosa's for a bite."

"Ugh, *mom*, do you really have to send them to my *work*? They're fucking embarrassing. No one wants them there."

Maggie gives a quiet laugh that only Richie hears, a sparkle in her eye. "Take it easy on your sister, though, would you?"

"Aye, aye, captain! I surely wouldn't disappoint ya." Richie salutes her *very* seriously, feels the burst of mirth and bemusement it creates, and ushers Bill and Stan back out of the kitchen.

"Bye, Mrs. Tozier. Have a good day!" Stan calls over his shoulder, while in the same moment Bill says, "See you later, Muh-Mrs. Tozier!"

Everyone already knows what's coming the second they walk downstairs, and that's a bit startling in and of itself, but also because it makes that mounting anxiety from before become just that much more prominent. *If not anyone else*, they seem to wonder collectively, *then why us?*

And, *If only us, then surely (unfortunately) this must involve It somehow.*

Richie whistles. Rocks forward onto the balls of his feet, scanning the Losers assembled in his basement, in various states of unease that he can both see and *feel*. "So, breakfast, anyone?"

He tapes a note to the coffee maker that reads, "*Father dearest, the caffeine-infused hot water you rely on for survival awaits! Enjoy your day*"

*ripping people's teeth out of their gums in exchange for money. What a dream. -Warmest regards, your favourite son, Richard*", takes the wad of money from the counter and stuffs it into his pocket, and wheels his bike out of the garage to join his friends on the carefully-curated front lawn.

"Alrighty, chaps, away with us, then!" he hollers, throwing himself onto his bike and pedalling furiously away down the street while the Losers scramble to follow suit.

"No, Rich, because it's ridiculous. That's just *words*. You can't just throw random words together and expect them to make sense." *'And there's nothing sexual about accounting, anyway.'*

"That's where you're wrong. Math is always sexy. It's, like, objectively, the *sexiest* subject. Right, Stan?"

"Please don't drag me into this," Stan begs, bringing down the kickstand of his bike in the alley behind Rosa's while the rest of the Loser dump theirs unceremoniously in a heap by the wall.

*'How do you guys put up with this all the time?'* Bev asks without asking, flashing Richie a shit-eating grin that he returns tenfold. "Somehow it's worse in your head, did you know that?"

"Course I do, Bevv. It's my own head for me to romp in, after all. Wait 'til you uncover my porn sta--" Eddie claps a hand over Richie's mouth but he still manages to project a deeply unsettling mental image to the lot of them, whether by accident or not he really can't tell.

The con to reading each other's thoughts is that Eddie knows what Richie is planning to do a split second before he actually does it, so Eddie's hand disappears and Richie's tongue darts out to lick the empty air in front of him. *'What, you don't want my germs?'* he teases, wagging his tongue, while Eddie goes bright red and spits like a furious cat.

*'--worse for you actually since you don't even know **where** my hand*



*has been and really our hands are always full of germs at any given time and--'*

"Oh, I can only guess where it's been. Only follow the whims of my wildest fantasies," interrupts Richie in his atrocious Southern Belle voice, bending backwards melodramatically with a hand to his forehead.

Eddie gets redder, if possible, pushing him the rest of the way over while hissing, "Fuck you, that's so gross," as they tip over onto the asphalt together.

"I think we have to undo this telekinesis thing or I'm gonna lose it," Ben says decisively, and from where Eddie is trying to slap-fight him on the ground Richie bursts out laughing.

"It's telepathy, dude. Telekinesis is moving stuff with your mind. Please read *X-Men*."

"Whatever it is, Ben's right. I'm not even gonna make it through a day like this."

"Get used to it," Stan tells Mike, already on his way around the side of the café to where the front door is propped open, exchanging the cool morning breeze for the mouth-watering scent of French toast and hot chocolate. "God knows the rest of us had to."

And Bill laughs, a little bit inside his head and a little bit outwardly, thoughts reaching back to nudge Richie and Eddie and encourage them to follow the rest of them inside. Bill's word is law, even when unspoken, so they haul each other to their feet and scurry after the Losers Club to take over a large booth nestled in the corner, right beside the enormous window.

Something in the air turns once they've all settled in, solemnity and the severity of the situation they've found themselves in sinking in all at once. Richie, surprisingly, is the first to bring it up. "Yeah," he says out loud, though in barely more than a whisper, "so, on the subject of comics..." He doesn't have to finish, because everyone can already see the memories he's conjuring up of comic panels wherein the heroes -- or anyone with some kind of power, really -- becomes a

test subject, a guinea pig, a piece of research material with no autonomy. The kind of atrocities that they're subjected to, poked and prodded at in government facilities.

'We get it!' Mike cuts him off, looking decidedly ill. '*That's not going to happen to us, okay?*'

"We can't really guarantee that, Mike," Ben says, softly, kicking their shared tension up a notch. "I mean, can we really hide this forever?"

"We can try." Bev, as usual, is the picture of determination. Richie doesn't have to be a mind-reader to *know* that her unfailing stubbornness is an asset to them in any situation. Maybe Ben isn't the only one with common sense, here (though, Bev *did* take Richie up on his Chubby Bunny challenge last night and *win*, while Ben panicked and prepared to do the Heimlich, so... maybe it's situationally dependent). "It's not like we all sprouted antennae from our heads or grew wings, you know? It's not like it's *obvious* something's different." She tapers off into silence as Hannah approaches the table with her nose in the air, like the snobby seventeen-year-old she truly is.

"What do you losers want?" she grumbles, whipping out a pad of paper from her apron pocket, and a little giggle ripples among them as they exchange a look. *Losers, indeed.* And triumphant ones, at that.

Richie picks up and examines the drink menu while everyone else places their orders, and when Hannah rounds on him last, he grins and says, "I'll have--"

"No, he won't! No, you won't. The last thing you need is fucking espresso. He'll just have the pancakes." Eddie kicks him under the table and, well, *fine*. Richie doesn't protest because espresso truly has never agreed with him, anyway, but he kicks back and blows a raspberry at him.

Hannah curls her lip at them, eyebrow raised, and mumbles something about him being fucking whipped as she stalks off towards the kitchen. Richie's face warms.

Bill sighs, heavily, and leans forward into his hands, irritation rolling off of him in waves.. “You-- thuh-that’s exactly the kind o-of thing that-- *ugh*.”

“*That*,” Stan continues for him, “is exactly the kind of thing that’s going to make it obvious.”

“Well, damn, *sorry*, but do you really want Richie hyped up on caffeine right now?” Eddie hisses back, leaning across the table towards him.

“I’d rather deal with *that* than being fucking vivisected in some secret underground lab!”

“Can we not talk about this?” Mike squeaks. There’s a bead of sweat rolling down the side of his face now. “Like, at all, but especially not out loud.”

Richie glances around. While the café is far from being packed, there *are* other patrons around, casting curious looks at the gaggle of thirteen-year-olds kicking up a fuss in the corner booth.

“Oh my god, we’re all guh-gonna fucking die,” Bill laments, face still hidden in his hands. ‘*We’re all gonna die because not **one** of us is capable of keeping our mouths shut.*’

And, well, he’s not *wrong*.

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